

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"If we think (the people) not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion."

Jefferson

Corps of Engineers projects for reducing flood risks usually require the endorsement of those in the area to be benefited and often their financial support. Worthwhile projects sometimes falter and die for lack of that necessary local support.

It seems that people would be interested in learning about flooding that could threaten their lives and property and that they would act promptly when a way of mitigating the threat was presented. Unfortunately, that's not the case. Presenting people with information on flood risk does not necessarily ensure their learning and learning does not necessarily lead to action to reduce the risk.

This lack of response to information on risk has been studied in recent years by psychologists and other social scientists. Some of the reasons why these kinds of communications are often ineffective are coming to light and that knowledge offers hope of improving future efforts. This booklet summarizes the most promising information including concepts of what's involved in the process of risk communication, the nature of problems that impede communications and suggestions for improving communications.